

Destination India And French Inbound Travel: A Critical Analysis Of The Tourist Mind

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Abstract:

Since centuries, travellers in France and their penchant for seeing the world have occupied centre-stage in the French society both as a cultural as also a significant economic activity. To the extent that the country attracting high inflow of international tourist traffic has made the international tourist consider and transform the destination itself into a near fashion accessory today.

India has in this regard remained a slightly late starter but post liberalization policies in the 90s followed by a well-planned tourism strategy, the country has rapidly become one of the highly preferred tourist destinations for many western nations. During the last decade, France has remained among the top five highest tourist generators to India and under the impact of the Incredible India campaign, India was able to make a distinct place for itself in the mind of the French tourist.

The present article is an attempt at presenting this transformation of mobility and travel trends where presumably the king of tourist destination becomes itself a substantial tourist generator for India. The article is based on observations and data collected during my visits to France between 2009 and 2016 combined with personal interactions with French tourists in India. It elaborates upon major trends in outbound travel of French tourists in general and attempts to critically analyse the tourist mind. In the process, we present here also, an overview of initiatives of the two governments for promotion of tourism.

Keywords: *Travel, France, tourist mind, destination marketing.*

INTRODUCTION

The substantial growth of leisure travel and tourism world-over heralds the international tourism sector as the largest and the most rapidly growing sectors of modern era. Very often the proponents of globalization have contended that massive social and political changes have in turn promoted, what they term as a “borderless world”.

One the one hand whereas this could be termed as apposite process that liberated mobility and travel, on the other hand, critics described it as a gradual process of erosion of cultural uniqueness and domination of market processes. This in fact, lies at the base of the transformation of the process where uniqueness of a destination for the outsider whether in terms of physical features, cultural heritage, lifestyles or such other distinguishing traits leads

to the initial interest and desire to explore the unseen. The later steps to fulfill this desire through travel is the genesis of the phenomenon of Tourism.

It is this point which metamorphoses the traveller into a tourist.

“L’idée que dehors du travail il puisse y avoir d’autres activités, non seulement légitimes, mais valorisantes et susceptible de définir positivement l’individu, est une idée moderne”...

**{The idea that beyond work there can exist activities not only legitimate but valuable and susceptible to defining the individual positively, is a modern thought.}*

The Association between the two nations is not new and has been seen since centuries where travellers were drawn to this land of ancient civilization and unparalleled beauty and knowledge. The present article is an overview of the Indo French tourism sector where the role and involvement of the principal stakeholders is examined.

PRIMARY AND SECONDARY DATA AND SOURCES

The present research work is essentially of the category of an exploratory work, and therefore, the findings here would examine both already existing parameters as well as some others which emerge as determining elements in grasping contemporary trends and changes. In the course of the present research, we would take into account factors such as age-group, sex, marital status, income, place of residence, purpose of visit, length of stay, seasonality of holidays taken, etc., and in the light of these, draw out the larger profile of the contemporary French tourist. Also, despite the fact that the line between business travellers and holidayers/sight seers seems to be shrinking in the market driven global culture, for the larger part, we have proceeded with the principle focus being on the leisure tourist from France and the related aspects that draw out his profile.

A second part of the data here, has been collected and analysed to map out the behavioural characteristics and the psychographic elements that define and dictate the tourists’ choices, attitudes and biases. Also important, are the analyses of choice of destination, main attractions, principal sources of information used for selection of destination, mode(s) of transportation used, lodging and many other such parameters.

The other part of our field study is linked to studying and analysing secondary data. We collected several tourist brochures, India promotional catalogues and relevant statistics from ministries and bodies like the Bureau of Aviation, and Bureau of Immigration. Also important is literature survey in the form of manuals, journals and relevant articles both in English and French. Also reports of the GoI (tourism ministry) , annual statistics prepared by the ITDC, as also surveys carried out by WTO, WTTC, OECD, etc were taken for information.

This was accompanied by a crucial phase of reading and analysing relevant documents, journals and books at the “Bibliothèque Nationale de la France” BnF and the “Library of Tourism and Voyages,” Paris. Also of immense importance were the literature and documents available at the library of the Indian Embassy in Paris providing data on India government supported tourism promotion ventures during the past years, and relevant but

limited documentation on the Festival of India in France during the late 80s and going onto 90s and the Incredible India phase.

As a first step to understanding the French tourist in India, it would be interesting to take a look at some of the early writings by French travellers on India.

INDIA THROUGH THE EYES OF THE OUTSIDER

Before going on to elaborate upon the present topic of study, it would be interesting to take a quick look at early representations of India in world travel narratives and impressions of some of the important French travellers to India.

Long before tourism acquired its present day dimensions and the “tourist” was still a “traveller”, India had been an object of intense interest and the “terra incognita” inspiring boundless awe and curiosity across borders. The travel accounts of the many foreign travellers from Hiuen Tsang, Fa-hien, and Megasthenes who visited India in search of knowledge in the ancient times, going on to European and Arab voyagers such as Marco Polo, Al Beruni or Ibn Batuta during the medieval age, India was visited, experienced and recounted elaborately in the distant lands of the West and the Far East.

Entering this context is an interesting interpretation of French travel accounts to Asia in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. Coinciding with a period of unprecedented demand in France for publications that satisfied the public’s curiosity for information on what was perceived as “ l’Orient mystérieuse” “The mysterious East”, the genre of travel literature flourished in proportion to the public’s demand for adventure and “voyeuristic intrigue”. While cross-cultural travel narratives served multiple purposes of information as well as construction of exotic stereotypes, the act of traveling itself was somewhere culturally transforming the traveller.

The travel accounts of early modern French travellers to the Middle East and Asia provided a both empiricist as well as postmodern interpretations of cross-cultural encounters. Through the rich volumes of diaries, journal entries, and letters, a vast repository of knowledge was accumulated, which led to a more sensitive and pronounced appreciation of cultural diversity. This seemingly had also, political and business interests in mind. It is a different episode of History that the French East India could not succeed in protecting its interests in India and ultimately got confined to Pondicherry and Chandernagar. Yet, this ushered in an era of Indo French interaction from the 17th century itself and has passed through several phases of collaborations.

It was apparent through the accounts of priests, ambassadors, merchants, physicians, and travellers, that the physical distance from France enabled them to report more sensitively on Asian cultures to a French audience and, hence, to assist in the dismantling of the “crude stereotypes, superstitious prejudices, and xenophobic ignorance” that were typical of the occidental imagination.

Perhaps the most popular French travelogue of the seventeenth century was that of Jean-Baptiste Tavernier¹ whose reflections on India were reprinted twenty-one times by the mid-eighteenth century. “India as seen through Tavernier’s eyes, revealed to Europeans a diverse continent--one that was politically, religiously, and socially varied”² .

Over time, the travelogues dealing with south Asia were impressive and compelling testimonies for the increasing, and enduring, affection of French readers for Indian cultures, and the strategic part played by French sympathies in defending the sanctity of cultural uniqueness in the face of foreign interference.

In fact, the insights of Bernier³ , Tavernier, and Pyrard⁴ in many ways acted as the precursors to the later travel writings, setting the scene for the future works of French Indology.

The next section of the article attempts to present an overview of the travel trends of the contemporary French tourist followed by the initiatives of the governments of the two countries to collaborate in the promotion of tourism.

UNDERSTANDING THE MENTALITY OF THE FRENCH TOURIST

As a fundamental base to our understanding of the individual tourist mind, it would benefit enormously to try and explore the interpretation of leisure and tourism as found among the majority of French.

A general view in this regard is that French are by nature more prone to longer leisure time and less work. What could be the inference from this statement? Are they by nature laidback? Or are they more stressed? Or is it simply the value accorded culturally to the idea of leisure and travel that makes them more conscious of work schedules, work week structures and so on? We often find the French way of life, compared to American and other western nations, much more family centered and structured on ideas such as “warmth”, “expectations” and “belongingness”.

Basing our interpretation on the well-known theory of Max Weber in which he has talked about the influence of religion on the work culture⁵, we can derive some interesting factors about the French way of thinking. The socio religious grounding that places the ideology of money making and work obsessiveness at the cost of “goodness and family attachment” as distasteful, is characteristic of the Catholic ideology--- France prominently being one. America, firmly

¹ TAVERNIER, J.B; “Travels in India”; Ed. Velentine Ball; 2 Vols.;Macmillan, 1889; London

² DIRKS, B. Nicholas; “Castes of Mind : Colonialism and the Making of Modern India”; Permanent Black; 1905.

³ BERNIER, Francois;“Voyages dans les Etats du Grand Moghol; Intro. De France Bhattacharya (Artheme FAYARD ED. Paris, 1981.)

⁴ PYRARD, DE Laval; “Voyages de Pyrard de Laval aux Indes Orientales(1601-1611).;Chandeigne; 1998;

⁵ WEBER,Max;“Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism”; Routedledge; N.York; London; 1992.

grounded in the Protestant ideology and believing in the primacy of work and economic prosperity conveniently labels “leisure time as the sin of sloth”. In a case of literal extremity, what is resultant, is that “time is money”. The contemporary market economy and the accompanying consumer culture is making people place a monetary value on time. Leisure then naturally comes at a cost and is consciously chosen or not chosen by the individual. It means that the more we have, the more these possessions become indispensable to us and in continuing to need them one is caught in the cycle of work-consume-work which naturally leaves no time for leisure or travel. The crux is, that work, whose principal role is to earn money slowly encroaches upon the very time which is supposed to have been enjoyed through the money earned.

As the French normally say, and which is classically reflected in the country’s history of frequent strikes and public protests against any kind of “work excesses,” “what use is a lot of money if one doesn’t have enough leisure time to enjoy it?” This had clearly been the basic reason pushing a lot of people to prefer the 35 hrs week structure (commonly referred to as the RTT, (*Reduction du temps de travail or Reduction in Work Time*)⁶ rather than the new format introduced at that point by the then Sarkozy government.

CONSUMERISM AND THE FRENCH TOURISTS

It would not exactly be wrong to begin with the statement that the largest chunk of tourism (that which is developing or being promoted globally), is very much an offshoot of the consumerist philosophy which has pervaded a major part of one’s everyday lifestyle and simultaneously pushed up motivation scales for more leisure time . In France, the 35 hr. work travel and discovering more destinations across the globe. The trends have been growing with dropping international air fares and more leisure time at hand. 40% of the salaried class feel that this has led to major changes in the consumption patterns as well as in the overall behaviour towards outbound long haul journeys.

Trying to strike a balance between the promised “leisure and relaxation” underlined in tourist brochures and the intense desire to combine all activities listed as “must do’s” for the trip, (shopping, sightseeing, visiting monuments etc.), the tourist often ends up being a mere puppet before standardized patterns of travel. **There has been seen a sort of double image of the French tourist who wants to remain close to his roots at the same time explore newer countries and destinations. According to a study conducted by the Direction de Tourisme France, it was concluded that among contemporary tourists, nearly 35% were ready to pay higher amounts as travel expenses if that meant promoting sustainable tourism and harmony with nature and environment. This shows an eco-friendly attitude on the part of the tourists which is heartening to the resources, flora and fauna of the destination.

⁶ <https://www.service-public.fr/particuliers/vosdroits/F34151>; Service-Public.fr; Le site official de l’administration francaise.

As concerns value for money, the French tourists have been seen to be price conscious and also, extremely particular about security issues and personal safety. Thus, efforts in this direction necessitate a good infrastructure in insurances, provisions against thefts and also, on a larger level check on terror activities since more than wars, it is paradoxically instances of terror attacks that leaves tourists feeling vulnerable and unprotected by the host country's security systems. The French tourists have another crucial area of concern and that is the aspect on hygiene and health. Although slowly the contemporary tourists there are getting more and more interested in visiting Asian sectors, this aspect is often left wanting. Moreover, it is not always the luxury class tourists demanding such facilities but the general/budget category inbound tourist also, who wants desirable health and sanitation aspects.

In France, it is interesting to see a preponderance of the tourists' demands and choices. Tailor made trips, focusing on specific travellers have introduced an era of "flexi holidays" and "niche tourism". Trends in outbound French tourism have shown that mass holiday packages already had core segments comprising of "business tourists" and "le troisième âge" (the 50+) age group. Recently, more sophisticated marketing has led to emergence of newer segments such as : **a) pilgrims, b) musicians, c) students, d) single mothers, e) gays and many such others.**⁷ During the first nine months of year 2016, 110,000 French tourists were said to have used the "benefit segmentation" approach to design their vacations, whether domestic or foreign, during winter or summer. In other words, with the escalation in the consumerist trends world over and likewise in France, tourism has emerged as and become a regular product like any other, in the market, to be purchased at a price exerting pressure for quicker appreciation of newer demands.

THE FRENCH TOURIST AND HIS CHOICES:

In assessing the contribution of a domain like tourism to the internationalization of the French society, the basic issue remains with the individual, the actor who travels and who decides to physically deplace. Our research is essentially taking off from here that is the study of the tourist himself. However, as remarked earlier, it cannot be denied that this individual who decides to move, to spend and to see, is himself essentially a product of the socio cultural and economic realities of his own country/society as well as in the larger plane, those of the world. Thus, to be able to explore the details of a country as a viable tourist generator, it is important to understand the basic trends of the tourists choices, the mindset in relating to the policies of the State and market movement as developed in the past few decades.

France has always remained the top tourist recipient in the world and the aura that developed around lifestyles in France, the wine culture, fashion or even the bistros on the numerous Parisian sidewalks have managed to cultivate a natural background for development of tourism and the hospitality industries here. It is indeed an interesting as well as a comparatively unresearched aspect thus, to try and understand the same country as a tourist generating market for any other part of the world-- in our case, it being for India.

⁷ <https://www.millenaire3.com/content/download/1318/18076>

In the present study, we are attempting to draw the outline of the society, its socio cultural moorings and, economic structures which have driven tourism trends in France. How much these earlier trends or to what extent the stereotypical thinking and spending priorities have shaped up choices and attitudes for the individual tourist will ultimately carve out the tourist mind and the choices made.

SOME BASIC TRENDS

Since the last fifteen years, almost a fifth of the French (18%) have gone at least once for a holiday abroad for personal or professional reasons. The average budget per person remains approximately 1150 euros, 30% higher than the average European. World over, since the progression in 1994, '95, there was a relatively slack phase for outbound travel in 1996-'97. (-2.9---5.9%).1998 saw a resurgence with nearly 19 million⁸ departures approximately outside France. This went well till the 9/11/ 2001 which again dipped figures in international travels and took a while to get back on track.

In 2005, the French made a total of more than 35 million foreign trips. More than 8 million trips had new destinations as choices, comprising of 23% of all foreign trips from France. This is seen as above the EU average of 17%. Foreign trips increased at a rate of 12% over the period 2002-2005, while trips to newer destinations increased by 47% in the same period⁹.

All these new places had a growing number of French tourists between 2002 and 2005: Europe (+95%), the Middle East (+61%), South Asia (+50%), Africa (+48%), East Asia (25%) and Americas (+21%).

--- Sun and beach holidays emerged as the most preferred holidays for French tourists.

---- The use of the Internet for choosing a holiday destination, booking a trip and finding more travel information is increasing.

---- Inbound tour operators and specialised outbound tour operators are the most interesting travel trade partners for the contemporary French tourist;

--- Apart from the internet, the trade fairs 'Salon Mondiale du Tourisme', 'Top Resa', "Le Monde a Paris", and several other travel, trade and consumer magazines, travel shows and road shows have been most suitable and effective in reaching potential customers.

On the demographic front, the French population is forecast to grow 4% by 2025. The 25--39 age group is seen to decline by 9%; the 40--54 group will decline by 6% and the 55--69 age group will increase by 28 %. As concerns outbound travel, or France as a tourist generating market, 90% of French choose to holiday in France and trends show that most of the movements are to neighboring countries or to the "country homes" or what are referred to as "residences secondaires". According to the annual statistics compiled by the Direction

⁸ <https://www.indexmundi.com/facts/france/international-tourism>

⁹ Ibid.

de Tourisme, France, for the year 2007¹⁰, the French registered about 190 million personal vacations. Nine out of ten were found to be within France (a figure that has remained almost constant since 2006). Among the remaining 20 million holidays spent abroad, 70% remained limited within Europe. Once again, a reaffirmation of the fact that French do not generally opt for long haul vacations. Among the most preferred nations, Spain remained at the top (9.3 million), followed by UK (3.3 million), Italy (3.2 million), and Germany, (2.3 million). These were followed by Portugal, Tunisia, Morocco, Belgium, US and Turkey. Among the regions fast gaining popularity for French tourists, are Indo China, Mideast and Reunion.

The French tourist since a long time has been described as “homestruck” “scared of cold” -- but recently according to a report in a leading daily of France concluded that the new generation French tourist, much different from his earlier counterparts was in more ways more accepting and open to traveling to far off destinations and see the unseen¹¹. A major reason cited for this change in trends was the language barrier going down with the younger generation and openness to experiments.

According to Bernard Gentil, ex chief of the statistics division of Overseas French Affaires¹², said there were not only more French willing to go holidaying to other countries but the number of French who had settled there, some having in course of time adopted other nationalities and many who maintained a dual citizenship. Reasons cited here are aplenty; like globalization of economy, industrial spread over in different countries, French firms establishing offices in other country markets etc. But the basic fact remains that curiosity has taken over the better part of the French attitudes and they are open to other cultures and more receptive to life beyond its own frontiers. In this respect, it was reportedly Asia which saw highest popularity.

MAJOR TRAVEL TRENDS OF THE FRENCH TOURIST

India constitutes a long haul destination for France. The distance between the two points averages between 6616.16 kms. and 7023kms. (Paris-N.Delhi, Paris-Mumbai, respectively), and including flying time of approximately 8 1/2 to 9 hrs. As a tourist generating market for India, France occupies the 6th position among the international markets and till 2011, constituted almost 4.2% of foreign tourist arrivals in the country. In the first half of the century, the growth achieved was in the range of 4.0% to 5.6%. During the last decade and a half, the French economy played an important role in leading the euro zone with average growth rates hovering from 3.4—4.2 %. Contraction began in France later than most other advanced economies and moreover, rise in incomes indicated a comfortable margin for spending on leisure. Official estimates put France’s outbound travel market at approximately

¹⁰ <https://www.data.gouv.fr/fr/datasets/le-secteur-du-tourisme-2/>

¹¹ https://www.enterprises.gouv.fr/files/files/...stats-tourisme/...chiffres_cles06_gb.pdf

¹² https://www.enterprises.gouv.fr/...statistiques/stats-tourisme/---/chiffres_cles04_gb.pdf

16.6 million. Over the period 2009-2016¹³, outbound travel from France showed a rise of 5.6% per annum but simultaneously, an average annual decline of 2.4% since 2007 was also seen. During the 90's and the initial part of the new century, internal disturbances and strikes across France had led to major social upheavals and affected significantly, the outbound tourist traffic. As concerns the long haul segment of travel among the French, figures vis a vis the rest of Europe showed a comparatively slow rise.

It is interesting to see the sudden increase in 1986, post the Festival of India in France, where growth registered was almost to the tune of 49%. Again '87 showed a slight dip followed by 1988-'90, arrivals that showed a positive trend followed by a decrease by 12.8% and 4.9% respectively. Again from 1992 onwards, traffic grew by 3.4%, 12.7% and 13.3% in 1994, 1995 and 1996. The year 1998 saw a decline of 2% and again an increase of 4.3% over the previous term. In 2004, among the top 10 international markets for India, France ranked 4th with no. of arrivals at 1,29,044 constituting nearly 3.9% of total international arrivals. These numbers were exceeded only by the US, UK and Sri Lanka.

This was followed by France registering as one of the top tourist generating markets for India in 2005¹⁴ witnessing a growth of about 35 per cent in arrivals from France. During the year 2006, in a major boost to the tourism industry in India, France, which is one of the top tourist generating markets for the country, entered into agreement to promote each other's destinations and share market research for the purpose.

GOVERNMENT PROJECTS ON BILATERAL COLLABORATION

Since the past two decades, policies at the State level and bilateral initiatives have played a significant role in pushing up visitation rates of French tourists to India. Ever since the Festivals of India in the 90s followed by Incredible India campaign from the Indian side and the Bonjour India series starting in 2009, 2013 and 2017-2018 have taken Indo French relations to a new height.

Important MoUs and joint collaborations were signed by the leaders of the two countries Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the French president Francois Hollande during the former's official visit to France during 10-11 April 2015.

These apart from other sectors of cooperation and partnerships, a strong emphasis was seen in the domain of culture, heritage conservation, tourism and people to people contact. Administrative Arrangement in the field of Cultural Heritage The Administrative Arrangement between the Indian Ministry of Culture and French Ministry of Culture and Communication, envisages cooperation in the field of cultural heritage, through training of Indian heritage

¹³ <https://www.oecd-ilibrary.org/industry-and-services/oecd-tourism-trends-and-policies-2016/france-domestic-inbound-and-outbound-tourism-tour-2016-table32-en>

¹⁴ tourism.gov.in/sites/default/files/newITS2005.pdf

conservation professionals at the Institute National du Patrimoine (INP), a higher education establishment of training for curators and restorers in the field of heritage in France, as well as Development of cultural and scientific cooperation in the fields of conservation and restoration of the heritage, short duration training sessions in India by INP trainers in Indian institutes and training of French training in India etc. Letter of Intent on Tourism as also a letter of Intent for increasing cooperation in tourism sector signed between India and France aims to promote sustainable bilateral tourism between the two countries including through mutual promotion of tourism, ensuring safety of tourists and encouraging sharing of expertise and best practices. The agreement also seeks to facilitate twinning of sites having historical, natural and cultural significance in India and France for promoting them as tourist destinations.

Besides helping each other in marketing of tourism and sharing market research, India and France have in the recent past, actively cooperated in the area of trade and tourism investment, travel related services as well as training programmes between the respective private sectors.

India added a tourism promotion office in Paris “Bureau de Tourisme” to look after tourism promotion activities there and organize various promotional events to project different aspects of Indian destinations.

On a separate note, it is heartening to see France trying to attract more and more visitors from India, as in the past few years, India has emerged as a potential outbound market for many of the traditional European and American destinations. With abounding technical expertise and a large skilled human resource base, Indian professional sector is booming ahead and a growing number of Indians abroad are been seen as lavish spenders.

TOURISM TRENDS IN FRANCE

In a field where qualitative analysis is spread out thinly and the larger inferences are based on statistics, figures unconsciously become a major determinant for assessing movement of market. According to statistics provided by the INSEE, the number of outbound trips rose from 2 million in late fifties to 3.8 million in 1964 and to 11.9 million in 1994. According to TNS-SOFRES, the number of short stays and personal visits abroad was 16 million in 1998. Which saw a rise from 13.6 million in 1993, showing growth of 17% within 6 yrs. As concerns expenditure abroad registered by the balance of payments they were registered at around 6 billion francs in 1970 to over 100 billion in 1998. However, the rates of change have been slow. As would be the proportion of holidays abroad, the barbarizations have been minimal, to say the least. According to figures given by INSEE, it was 13% in 1957, 14%- 15% till the end of 70s and 16-17% during 80s and 90s. This goes on to prove that nearly 90% of holidays were spent within the country. This portrays a dismal comparison to other industrialized nations around France-- UK, Germany, Belgium and Holland. Following this, SOFRES, carried out a study in 2003 calling it “les freins et motivations des francais a partir a l’etranger”(Deterrents and Motivations of French tourists to travel abroad). Many a time, the excuse given as to the low rate of outbound travel among French is a certain “culture vacancieres” (holiday culture) based on the philosophy -- the less one travels the less one wants to travel.

According to a 2005 study, it is nearly a fifth of the total, approximately 18% of the total French tourists who go abroad at least once annually for professional or personal reasons. In such cases, the average budget is somewhere around 1150 euros. Till 1994--'95, having experienced a progression, suddenly travel beyond borders saw a dip in '96-'97(-29.9% and -5.9%).¹⁵ This comfortably jumped back to 17 million outbound tourists during 1998. This upward trend remained rather static till the 9/11 bombings in 2001. This of course, led to a world wide slack, France not being the only exception. According to the reports of the Direction de tourisme reports, in 2014 alone, 19 million French went abroad at least once per year. A single trip to a foreign country averaged at least 7.9 days.¹⁶ What is seen as interesting in the report is, that as the destinations increased in distance from France, so did the average length of stay. Among the top destinations mentioned, were Spain and Italy accounting for nearly 1/4th of French visits outside the country.

In 2016, by European standards, the average amount spent per outbound holiday trip was €841 while 35% of French travellers spent more than €1,000. Therefore, the average Frenchman spent €71 per day. The overall holiday budget is increasing, and the French remain price sensitive preferring to stay in mid-range accommodation.

An important observation made in this survey regarding the choice of destinations was the difference shown by men and women. As such, the proportion of men : women shows 48% men : 52% women as outbound tourists and there too, for ex: men preferring destinations primarily offering safaris, adventure tourism, sports, pubs and casinos -- Namibia, Kenya Gabon, Macau etc. whereas female preferences were more for cultural tourism , health and spa, etc. favoring destinations such as Phillipines, India, China, Costa Rica etc.

AN OVERVIEW OF THE EVOLUTION OF THE FRENCH TOURIST

As specified in a lot of studies done on the basic profile type of the French tourist, it remains more or less certain that since the last decade of the 20th century, the typology of the tourist started seeing some marked changes whereas before that, this aspect remained dramatically stagnant since almost early 60s. During a period spanning nearly 35-40 years, the socio economic characteristics remained pretty much unchanged as did attitudes and ideas¹⁷.

Contemporary researches mark the following traits about the French tourist:

- a. It would more than often be a female;
- b. A professional with a considerably good income or someone with high disposable wealth (bureaucrats, professionals, liberal arts or even retired people);

¹⁵ <https://knoema.com/atlas/France/topics/Tourism/Outbound-Tourism-Indicators/Outbound-tourism-travel>

¹⁷ CLARY, Daniel ; Le tourisme dans l'espace français; Collection Géographie, ISSN 0338-2664 Géographie: Géographie de la France ; Masson, 1993 ; ISBN 2225842019, 9782225842016

Conspicuous here is the preponderance of the age bracket of 50 yrs and above with less responsibilities and a lot of free time at disposal. These were found to be staying in urban to semi urban areas (100, 000 people on an average), and very often near the Parisian region.

In discussing the evolution of the average tourist in France, it is interesting to note that during the end of the 50s and first half of the 60s, marked by the sudden surge in outbound travel to Spain, the workers from the lower income group (income less than 6000 francs per annum) occupied a negligible part in the category of foreign travels. In 1994-1995, this went down to 9% and further dipped to 6% in 1998. Contrary to this category, the group of blue collared and white collared professionals has been seen to oscillate between 15-20%, especially during the 90s. Again, the category of retired people traveling abroad grew rapidly -- 13% in 1978 to 39% in 1998. The age wise distribution makes it amply clear that the 50+ age group is one of the most responsive ones towards international travel generating nearly 39% (1995) of travel outside France. To be more precise, 22% of the market can be attributed to the 50-64 yrs group and 17% to the 65+ age group.

These figures however, need to be seen in perspective of the changes in structure of population in France (decline in the number of workers, aging of the average population, etc.) But, the fact that today 50% of holidays abroad are being availed of by white collared professionals and 50+ group, shows in itself a stark polarization of outbound travellers within the upper class. This reflects clearly the overall impact of globalizing cultures and internationalization of markets. To this is added the second level of bifurcation, much more stark and that is of those who go abroad for holiday and those who do not.

THE FRENCH YOUTH SEGMENT AND BACKPACKER TOURISM

More than often, this category of travellers from any country is taken as secondary in importance in destination promotion. The larger reason being economic. Since they travel on budget lines, their contribution through hotel stay, shopping etc. does not end up contributing majorly to the host country's economy. Moreover, very often they are marked by unscrupulous behaviour and attitudes that the host population may find unpalatable. There has been a growing no. of studies on backpacker travel culture which in fact, over emphasizes a certain "anti-tourist image" or as "nomadic perpetrators of global youth culture". Regarding the larger segment as "youth driven", Desforges, looked at global representations and local identities in youth travel as a mark of growing importance of this segment in international travel; a mobility what he termed as a "global postmodern phenomena".

The French, with their well-known "*liberté d'esprit*" (*freedom of spirit*), have been very often associated with setting such trends: ex-- Turkey, Nepal and the entire Himalayan trail, and more recently Sarnath and the Buddhist trail in the foothills region. Some surveys carried out in France affirm that a lot of the backpacker/young travellers actually preferred not to categorize themselves as "tourists" preferring instead to label themselves as "voyageurs" (travellers).

Statistical descriptions of the youth travel markets has generally included people aged between 15- 29 yrs. of age but according to more recent studies, 2002, WTO used the >25 yrs. as the cut-off point. Many other studies have however adopted the upper age limit of 26 years. According to a study commissioned by the European Travel Commission, it was found out that in France, UK and Germany, outbound travel for the youth and backpackers (15-29 yrs) accounted for 17% of all international travel from these markets in 2000. In 1995, a study undertaken by “Les Routards”, France had suggested four unique factors leading to growth in this segment¹⁸

- a) Large scale democratization of travel,
- b) Larger percentage of youth wanting to travel for education,
- c) An average decline in youth unemployment, and
- d) Growing importance of parental incomes.

Apart from these, various additional growth factors have emerged more recently, such as the proliferation in the number of low cost airlines, more flexible employment modes, and overall rise in socio cultural exchange/study/research programmes between countries.

A growing preferences for Asia has been increasingly seen among the contemporary French tourists. In fact, during discussions, four “typologies” of destinations holding potential in the French market were enumerated:

- a) Distance Factor -- comprising majorly of European cities, and North Africa;**
- b) Family and Friends affinity -- comprising of places farther away but visitation on the basis of friends and relatives;**
- c) Attraction of the Sun, Sea and Sand -- resorts, hotels not too far from place of residence); and**
- d) Fascination with the Unknown -- far off places, holding exotic value, unseen images.**

As remarked Jean-Paul Chantraine, of the groupe Asia, among 40 top regions world over attracting the contemporary tourist in France, Asia right from Turkey (Asia Minor) to Fiji held enormous growth potential. These destinations held high “discovery” quotient and were paradoxically also one of the cheapest globally. By present estimates, in 2015, out of every 5 tourists, 1 would be going to Asia and this would easily be 1 out of every 4 by 2020. Three principal reasons were given as the main factors behind the enormous potential and successive growth of this region as among top destinations of the world:

As regarding seasonality of travel and holidays, majority of studies have remarked upon the French tendency to take off on vacations during July/ August (27%), followed by May (13.4%), and finally in September, (9.5%). As mentioned above, The French have five weeks of paid

¹⁸ De la Rochefoucauld ,BEATRICE; “L'économie du tourisme”; Editions Bréal; 2007 ;Paris.

holiday each year. However, the 35-hour-week law means that those who exceed this limit, gain additional weeks of holiday, often up to 50 days. idays are planned by most French people as follows: three weeks are generally taken during the summer, mostly in August. August is the main month for holidays and in 2014-15 accounted for 25% of outbound departures. Furthermore, in line with school holidays, one week is taken in February and one week in April. While 60% of the French take their holidays during the summer, as many as 93% take that holiday in France. During the summer, only 17% of departures are to overseas destinations. The French spend fewer holidays abroad than their European neighbours the winters, which is also Christmas time, (December and January), see on an average the least departures (4%), approximately. This in a way reemphasizes the French family centered values and attachment to one's homeland.

Figures projected on an average about the duration of stays that the French resort to, has been rather short, with 28.7% of holidays being less than 3 nights 55.5% when it be in France), with 33.5% from 4-7 nights (24.3 in France), and 27.3% from 1-2 weeks (13.6%),, 8.5% from 2-4 weeks (5.2) and I month and more , only 2%. Long haul trips(officially 4 nights and above) in Western Europe remains 63% in Central Europe, 74% in Eastern Europe, from 91% in the Middle East, 90% in Asia and 93% in America.

France is the world's 4th top market in terms of spend on international travel. Traditionally holidays have been taken domestically, but outbound holiday-taking is now increasing as demand for low-cost/no-frills airlines has risen and outbound travel is more appealing than domestic holidays as a result of the holiday cost.

Some of the most popular type of outbound holidays for French people is a beach holiday. However, they are also keen touring holidaymakers, and enjoy learning about different cultures and discovering new places. Good weather is an important factor in French people's vacation decision making – a preference reflected in their choice of destinations. Traditionally there has been a bias towards the summer for their main holidays. However, shorter trips such as city breaks are taken more widely through the year. The average duration of foreign holidays can range from around a week to up to two weeks (for a touring holiday)

CONCLUSION

Economic factors are like all other countries are of considerable importance in influencing spending patterns of tourists for foreign visits. In that context, the French economy since 1990 has been struggling with ever increasing rates of unemployment and therefore worries about job security, which are directly responsible for determining outbound tourism trends and volume.

Nevertheless, it is Europe's third largest international travel origin, has much potential, and, given increasing liberalization in its air transport sector, and efforts of the new government to improve employment situation and economic competitiveness, the country still offers destinations solid reasons to promote their tourism products to the French clientele.

In the present article we tried to draw a basic profile of the contemporary French tourist and his preference of India as a tourist destination. In the process what also emerged was the overall attitude of the French towards travel, destinations, work week structure and preferred sources of information about preferred destinations of holidays.

It is a fact that the tourism trends in any society are far from being static. Depending on the newer lines of exchange and collaboration, the India of elephants, maharajas and snake charmers is definitely re-establishing itself as a rapidly growing economy and modern lifestyles. In its own way, this impacts the image of India among the contemporary tourists in France who seem equally if not more interested in exploring the country. Often quoted as India being a land of continuity and change, it is actually a dual benefit to India's image where a 5000 year old civilization can be experienced simultaneously along with the most advanced technologies and up to date infrastructural facilities.

It is a watershed moment for the contemporary French tourist as well as for the strengthening of India's cultural and economic identities----- how this transforms into a larger dialogue of exchange and collaboration would be the ultimate indicator of maturing cultures and geopolitical identities.

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